

# *The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass*

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If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond 'Amen' ('yes, it is true!') and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, 'the Body of Christ and respond 'Amen.' Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true. (St. Augustine) CCC n.1396)

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The Church understands the Communion Procession, in fact every procession in liturgy, as a sign of the pilgrim Church, the body of those who believe in Christ, on their way to the Heavenly Jerusalem. All our lives we who believe in Christ are moving in time toward that moment when we will be taken by death from this world and enter into the joy of the Lord in the eternal Kingdom he has prepared for us.

The liturgical assembly of the baptized that comes together for the celebration of the Eucharist is a witness to, a manifestation of, the pilgrim Church. When we move in procession, particularly the procession to receive the body and blood of Christ in Communion, we are a sign, a symbol of that pilgrim Church 'on the way.' For some, however, the experience of the Communion Procession is far more prosaic, analogous perhaps to standing on line in the supermarket or at the motor vehicle bureau. A perception such as this is a dreadfully inaccurate and impoverished

understanding of what is a significant religious action.

The Communion Procession is an action of the Body of Christ. At Christ's invitation, extended by the priest acting in Christ's person: Happy are they who are called to his supper, the members of the community move forward to share in the sacred meal, to receive the body and blood of Christ which is the sign and the source of their unity. In fact, each time we move forward together to receive the body and blood of the Lord, we join the countless ranks of all the baptized who have gone before us, our loved ones, the canonized and uncanonized saints down through the ages, who at their time in history formed a part of this mighty stream of believers.

This action by Christ's body, the Church assembled for the Eucharist, is manifested and supported by the Communion Hymn, a hymn in praise of Christ sung by the united voices of those who believe in him and share his life. The hymn should begin at the Communion of the priest and extend until the last person has received Communion.

This hymn is prayer, the corporate thanksgiving prayer of the members of Christ's Body, united with one another. Over and over again the prayers of the liturgy and the norms of the General Instruction emphasize this fundamental concept of the unity of the baptized, stressing that when we come together to participate in the Eucharistic celebration

we come, not as individuals, but as united members of Christ's body.

Finally, the fact that the Communion Procession is a profoundly religious action tells us something about the way in which we should participate in this procession. We are the Body of Christ, moving forward to receive the Christ who makes us one with himself and with one another. Our procession should move with dignity; our bearing should be that of those who know they have been redeemed by Christ and are coming to receive their God!

The General Instruction asks the Conference of Bishops in each country to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion.

The Conference of Bishops of the United States has determined that in this country Communion will be received standing and that a bow will be the act of reverence made by those receiving. The significance of unity in posture and gesture as a symbol of our unity as members of the one body of Christ should be the governing factor in our own actions.

Those who receive Communion may receive either on the tongue or in the hand, and the decision should be that of the individual receiving, not of the person distributing Communion. If Communion is received in the hand, the hands should first of all be clean. If one is right handed the left hand should rest upon the right. The host will then be laid in the palm of the left hand and then taken by the right hand to the mouth. If one is left-handed

this is reversed. It is not appropriate to reach out with the fingers and take the host from the person distributing.

The person distributing Communion says audibly to each person approaching, 'The Body of Christ'. This formula should not be altered, as it is a proclamation which calls for a response of faith on the part of the one who receives. The communicant should audibly respond 'Amen,' indicating by that response his or her belief that this small wafer of bread, the wine in this chalice are in reality the body and blood of Christ the Lord.

When one receives from the chalice, the same proclamation is made by the person distributing Communion and the Communicant again responds 'Amen.' It should be noted that it is never permissible for a person to dip the host he or she has received into the chalice. If, for some reason, the communicant is not able or willing to drink from the cup then that person should receive only under the form of bread.

Each time we receive Holy Communion at Mass, may our "Amen" strengthen us and evoke joy in our hearts for the great gift of the Most Holy Eucharist.